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1914



Monograph

YALE UNIVERSITY PRIZE POEM

1914

MEMORIES

BY

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YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS

1914

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PREFATORY NOTE

This poem received the sixteenth award of the prize offered by Professor Albert Stanburrough Cook to Yale University for the best unpublished verse, the Committee of Award consisting of Professor Charlton M. Lewis, of Yale University, Professor Frederick M. Padelford, of the University of Washington, and Judge Wendell P. Stafford, of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia.

1

MEMORIES

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.

WORDSWORTH.

TO MY FATHER

I thought to paint the glory and the gleam,
The transcendental wonder of the dawn,
While yet the light on vale and wood and lawn,
On misty mountain-top and foaming stream,
Was lovely with the freshness of a dream;
And childhood cast on knowledge half withdrawn
The shy, bright glances of a woodland fawn,
Half dazzled in the dewy morning's beam.
And yet I see that in those days of old
Thy spirit colored mine, and evermore
My dreams were only stories thou hadst told;
And with my thoughtless fancies intertwined
Were flowers culled from books, and poet-lore,
And musings of a deeper heart and mind.

I

SILVER MOUNTAINS

That day I first began to live
When first he clasped my little hand,
Bright as a prince from fairyland,
Or king who has all gifts to give,

And laughed, 'Come, little one, away,
Where skies are very blue and clear;
Across the shining waters, dear,
We'll sail until the end of day.'

On city-waters had I been,
That dashed against the dirty docks
Sometimes a floating paper box,
Or peanut-shells, or orange-skin,

And these alone were known to me;
So, when he spoke of rivers bright,
And summer skies of smokeless light,
I wondered how these things could be.

And, wondering still, was borne afar
Beyond the farthest city-dock,
Beyond green walls of living rock,
Where, clear and shining as a star,

The waters laughed beneath the sky
That touched their dancing crests with light;
And, softly gleaming on the right,
The silver hills went sailing by.

The little towns and houses passed
Like pictures in my story-book;
And, gazing back with dreaming look,
I wondered how they moved so fast;

And, gazing forward, wondered, too,
If that blue hill would never end,
And looked beyond its farthest bend,
For other scenes and marvels new.

Beyond the bend, that wondrous hill
Swept forward to the morning sky;
The changing slopes went gliding by;
There shone the silver mountain still!

Beyond another turn it rose.
Then, by my wonder half-beguiled,
My father looked at me and smiled,
'Perhaps it never ends. Who knows?'

I could not tell. The morning light
Had lengthened through the languid noon;
Across the hills we saw it swoon,
And sleep upon the waters bright.

Although the daylight slowly waned,
 Though time and space seemed both to pass,
 Like sand within an hour-glass,
Those silver mountains still remained,

Unchanging through all seeming change.
 And, when we reached our journey's end,
 Beyond the utmost purple bend,
There rose, I knew, another range.

Beyond, and still beyond, they lie,
 Like fairy-mountains of a dream,
 And at their feet the waters gleam
And sleep beneath the summer sky.

II

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN

A lonely valley was our home,
 A flowery space between two hills,
 Full of the voice of mountain rills
Through rainbow-arches dashing foam.

There, rising o'er one misty height,
 And stealing down the other slope,
 And waking youthful eyes in hope,
The morning filled that vale with light.

Across ten fields, a brook, a bridge,
The slow sun journeyed all day long,
And trailed its glory through a throng
Of clouds above the western ridge.

Then well I loved to watch the change,
The sudden fire within the sky—
To see the daylight flush and die
Beyond the hills. Ah, passing strange

And rich must be the lovely land
Behind that mountain—realms of gold,
Where princes rule from days of old,
And diamond castles blazing stand;

Or archèd walks in flowery glades,
Where feet of ladies lightly pass
Like falling petals in the grass,
And linger in the fragrant shades,

Till through the flowers a sudden gleam
Shall crown their golden heads with light,
And their long trailing robes of white
Blush crimson in that rosy beam.

Or is it some black boundless plain,
Where fragments of old mountains lie
Blood-red beneath a bloody sky,
Upheaven once in wrath and pain

By giant hands that fought of yore,
In that last age ere man was born,
A mortal fight from morn to morn,
And perished and were known no more?

But father murmured, 'Why so still?
A penny for your dreams, dear child.'
And I looked up and shyly smiled,
'What country lies beyond the hill?'

'An easy thing, forsooth, to see!
To-morrow you and I will ride,
And look upon the other side;
Then shall we both the wiser be.'

And so we rode adown the dale.
I saw, with wondering, beating heart,
The misty mountains draw apart,
And leave a wide and shining vale.

And down that shining vale we went,
And on and onward through the day,
Till weary grew the dusty way,
And loveliness that morning lent

Had vanished in the noontide beams;
But my sweet land—I found it not,
My rosy, fairy, fragrant spot,
The sunset-land of all my dreams.

Only the merciless great sun
Blazed downward in the silent noon.
I murmured, 'Shall we reach it soon?
Oh, that this weary ride were done!'

'It is,' he said. 'Are you so blind?
Our weary ride has ended here,
For yonder is your mountain, dear,
And this the land we came to find.'

I looked half-doubting far and wide.
There lay the land I longed to know,
Beneath that garish light, and, lo!
It was just like the other side!

I sobbed against my father's arm,
Outwearied with the dust and heat,
Till, through the burning light that beat
Upon the hills, again the charm

And wonder of the azure pile,
And each mysterious sapphire fold
Of deeper blue, and gleam of gold,
Had wrought, to gladden and beguile,

The magic that shall e'en abide
Long as the ancient mountains stand,
And, as I looked, my wonderland
Was still upon the other side.

III

SPRING FLOWERS

'It is the first mild day of spring ;
Come, dear, put on your woodland dress,
For we will roam in idleness,
And you shall see a pretty thing.'

Across the spongy fields we went,
Disturbed two wriggling garter-snakes,
And reached the fairy water-breaks,
Where weeping willows swayed and bent,

And 'pussies' stood up straight and bold ;
And alders by the brimming brook,
Dangling their dusty tassels, shook
Upon its waves their powdered gold.

There, nestled in a hollow place,
Beyond the waters' wayward floods,
Some furry, half-awakened buds
Uncurled in wistful, childlike grace

Among the layers of crumbling leaves.
He said, 'They are so sweet and fair,
So soft and tender, blooming there !
And yet, methinks, it scarcely grieves

These first-born darlings of the spring
To leave their chilly haunts and bowers ;
To these caressing hands of ours
With half a human touch they cling.

But leave them, little one ! I know
A place untrod by human feet,
Where there are mysteries more sweet,
And fairer, stranger flowers blow.'

I cannot tell the path we took.
The way was wooded, dank, and dim ;
Long, long, it seemed, I followed him,
And fainter, farther off, the brook

Merged its low murmurings in the breeze ;
Till on a sudden there was light—
A flash of flowers shining white
Among the shadows of the trees.

Each snowy blossom, straight and tall,
Wrapped in its one green leaf alone,
In maiden stateliness they shone,
In stainless splendor over all.

'Nay, dearest, touch them not !' he said.
One shattered blossom's golden heart
Lay in my hand, and, with a start,
I found my fingers stained with red.

And, musing on that bleeding stem,
He spoke of voices heard of old
From wounded branches that had told
Of ancient wrongs still felt by them;

Of lost, lamented girlish bands,
Of whom one trace alone was found—
A cloud of flowers upon the ground,
That shattered, bleeding, in men's hands.

Yea, once there grew in days of yore,
Where fell a maiden martyr's blood,
The marvel of a snowy bud,
That, at a touch, was seen no more.

Still falls the glamour of those hours
O'er pages read in after days—
The shadow of the woodland ways,
And that white loveliness of flowers.

IV

PICTURES

There was a picture in my room,
And much I loved it, for the face
Would smile a little in its place
When dawn first silvered through the gloom,

Unsealing my young restless eyes.
And then I watched that mother dear
Who holds the lusty babe so near
Her heart, while a glad angel flies

To greet him, and around, above,
Ten thousand little childlike heads
Bloom in soft radiance, that sheds
A gentle light upon her love.

Dim memories of long ago
I felt in that dear face, perchance,
And in the grace of that sweet glance;
And that is why I loved it so.

My father said, when I could read
That I should learn in mother's book
That mother's story. Then I took
The heavy volume, proud indeed.

Now I could learn and understand—
Had I not read my primer through?
Yet more and more perplexed I grew;
The words beneath my tracing hand

Were queer and small and strange to me,
And blank to me the wonders there—
The wise men with their treasures rare,
The star that led them gloriously.

‘And is the second chapter done?’
His low, caressing tones I heard.
I pointed to an unknown word:
‘Kingdom—of Heaven, little one.’

‘Kingdom of Heaven!’ Kingdoms are
The realms where fairy princes dwell,
And maidens sleep beneath a spell,
In shining beauty like a star.

‘Kingdom of Heaven!’ Heaven—yes,
That is the deep encircling sky,
Where ever-changing clouds go by,
And burn in evening loveliness;

And gray as ashes in the night
They vanish, and we cannot know
Or whence they come or whither go,
Or where beyond the mountain-height

They find at last a resting place.
 'Kingdom of Heaven!' Vaguely sweet
 The words. Old dreams abide and meet
Within their visionary grace.

'Kingdom of Heaven—is at hand.'
 In mingled images it came.
 Among the clouds like sunset-flame
The glorious great angels stand,

And myriads of fairy kings,
 From far-off kingdoms in the skies,
 Come thronging on with shining eyes;
And in the midst the mother sings

Her little child a song of love;
 That lullaby from star to star
 Ten thousand voices, clear and far,
Echo through all the heavens above. . . .

And yet, do children dream these things?
 I did, but then I kept the dream,
 And clearer grew the treasured gleam,
Full light from childish glimmerings.

V
REVERIES

Red lilies in the dying light;
 Through blackened willows by the stream,
 A steely, gray, transparent gleam
On still dark waters; then the night.

And past the lilies, down the walk,
 I went with father hand in hand;
 His words were hard to understand,
And strange and serious his talk.

He seemed to say—I do not know—
 That dreams are false and foolish things;
 'T is not by fond imaginings
That souls of men may live and grow;

That he himself had vainly wrought
 A flimsy fabric light as air,
 Had loved the good if it were fair,
And rainbow-fancies more than thought.

Not angel-borne through flaming skies
 The kingdom comes—in peace within,
 Which is a dearer thing to win
Than all the flowers of Paradise.

And of this kingdom of the heart
 He murmured. Deeper, larger grew
 The night, and breezes shivering through
The dim-seen lilies made me start.

I sniffed the night-wind redolent
Of running waters, and the sound
Of quiet purling all around
Came with that fresh and dewy scent.

And plaining choruses I heard
Of nameless night-things. Then I caught
Dim intimations of his thought,
And here a phrase, and there a word.

I clasped his fingers close and tight.
They were so large and soft and warm;
They seemed to keep me safe from harm
In the great awfulness of night.

And, lost within the peace of dreams,
Although he seemed so close and dear,
His voice made music in my ear
Like far-off murmurings of streams.

And if I did not seem to hark,
Or heed my father's teaching then,
What did I more than other men
Who weave their fancies in the dark,

While still they clasp their Father's hand,
And warmly feel Him dear and nigh,
Although His wisdom is too high
For their low minds to understand?



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